Now all want to go back to Kunar, our parties are also in favour of that.

(my comment:) Such clear intentions to return home we only heard

from Shigalis. If this is the general opinion of the Shigalis rehabilitation programmes would be most fruitful in their area.

A Mullah from Dam Kalay (Salafi):

Q: Why don´t the refugees return home?

A: Two of my brothers went home. But it is an Islamic duty to obey the Islamic leaders. If they order us to go, we´ll go. We must not stop the *jihad*. We ask some men regularly to go to Kunar to investigate about the living and agricultural conditions in our villages but we leave our families here (in Bajaur) because we aren´t sure whether they could survive there. And the *jihad* must go on!

Q: Will it hamper the *jihad* if your families return?

A: Yes, when people get occupied with agriculture they will forget about *jihad*. On the other hand, Kunar is still not safe. Kunar is a part of Afghanistan and Afghanistan is *"dar ul-harb"* (Land of war occupied by infidels). Even if Kunar looks peaceful it cannot be considered as *dar ul-Islam* (liberated land of Islamic peace), because Afghanistan as a whole is *dar ul-harb*. *Dar ul-Islam* cannot be within *dar ul-harb.* Afghanistan will be *dar ul-harb* as long as we have an infidel Government in Kabul , hence Kunar is also *dar ul-harb* and it is a sin to bring women and children into *dar ul-harb.* If Kunar would be declared as *dar ul-Islam* nobody would see a reason to fight for the liberation of Afghanistan.

An Engineer from Narang:

Q: Why do you think so few refugees return to Kunar?

A: There is political insecurity. We have no central power. If you want to stay in Kunar you have to carry a Kalashnikov and you have to join a group which can protect you. There are too many conflicting groups there. There is general insecurity both politically and physically. For this reason nobody dares to bring back his family now. Everybody waits until the situation clears up. All wait eagerly to bring home their families. But at the moment I do not dare to bring back my family. We just learn that AIG will move to Kunar next week. This will entail new conflicts and fighting.

Q: Do you expect conflicts over land when the refugees return?

A: No, everybody will get back the land he owns. Should conflicts arise our elders will sit together and solve the conflict amicably according to our traditional rules everybody will abide to their verdict.

Q: Is it possible that people greedy for land might accuse their opponents of having sided with the communists just in order to grab their land?
A: Impossible! We all know each other, nobody can lie. The elders will settle everything.

Requests from NGOs:

A landowner and former Government official from Sarkanay:
Q: Formerly you people dug the canals yourselves, why not now?
A: Yes, but it needed a long time. Many generations, and every year the canals had to be cleaned. Now we needed many generations again to rebuild the canals, what shall we eat in the meantime? Now we need your help! We are ready to do the work if you help us.
Q: Should we help more the refugees in Pakistan or go into Kunar and help people there?
A; into Kunar!

A teacher from Shigal:
Q: As you know we are constructing two schools in Kunar, can you comment on that?
A: These days schools are only built in centres such as Chagha Sarai and Narang. There people have not suffered as much as in the more remote areas, however, the former get the most help, these people have collaborated with the communists. Why don´t you help the people in the far flung areas? There you´ll find the worst destructions. E.g.in Shigal the high school is totally ruined and nobody cares of rebuilding it. But in Narang the high school remained intact, why did you add there a second one? Why don´t you go to areas where the mujaheddin come from?
Q: What about Badel?
A: Badel is o.k., it is also a neglected area.
Q: Suppose we go to Shigal, would we find enough pupils and teachers there?
A: Yes, more than enough! Only few people fled that area. If people see a school being built they will come. If you have problems of finding teachers, go to Bajaur, we would be too glad to come and teach in Kunar, even for less money than we get now.

Another teacher from Shigal:
Q: Which teaching materials should be used in Kunar now?
A: At the moment we would prefer the materials from the Pakistani Commissionerate (for Afghan Refugees) in Peshawar, but it needs some changes, e.g. instead of Urdu as a secondary language we of course have to teach Farsi. English

should be taught as in Pakistan but in addition we want also Arabic as previous to 1978. Here (in Bajaur) too much stress is laid on sports. When our children walk to school for hours every morning they are tired and had enough sports.

Q: Have you heard about the Swedish school programme?

A: Yes, they have a school in upper Shigal, we appreciate it very much.

Q: What about the German Base Ed Programme?

A: I have seen the materials and a friend of mine went to one of their courses. They neglect discipline in school. Our children are very naughty and unruly, we cannot hold lessons without strict and sometimes harsh discipline. Afghan Children expect that.

Q: And their teaching materials?

A: It does not fit to the age of our children. Our pupils often are older than assumed by the authors of these school books. Children find the materials childish and loose interest.
(spontaneous remark:) If you need us (teachers) we are ready to come!

A mullah from Kerala:

Q: Does it make sense to build more schools as long as so few people are living in Kunar?

A: No, other projects are more relevant, e.g. there is a road from Kerala to the power station of Chagha Sarai. This road is cut into the soil, the latter forms a steep slope and may slide down any time and thus creates a hazard for the houses and also for the children near that place who might fall down into the river. We need help to repair that.

A Farmer from Shigal:

Q: What is most needed in Shigal now?

A: Mine clearance, road construction, schools.

Q: In this order?

A: Yes.

Q: Before we talked about canals; how have your canals been repaired before the war?

A: We did it ourselves. Everybody helped.

Q: You told me about *karezes* in Shigal, who built them?

A: In the time of the King there came a group of foreigners who looked into the earth, they told us where we would find water and left. We then brought people from Darra-e Nur who can build *karezes*. They really found water and built the *karez*.

Q: Who financed it?

A: We collected money among ourselves. The contributions were

dependent on the size of land one owned.

Q: Who cleaned the *karezes*?

A: Our *miraw* decided when and who.

Q: Was it done in *ashar*?

A; Yes, this is our tradition. If one wants to plant rice he will also call for *ashar*.

(Another informant interfered and explained that *ashar* is only on voluntary basis irrespective whether the participants.benefit from the common work. If a common work is compulsory like *karez*-cleaning it is called *sharik kar*.

Miscellaneous statements:

An animal husbander from Koranggal:

Q: Who decided who and when to flee?

A: People decided it by themselves. Our malek was absent at that time, he had to hide. When the Russians came we first fled to the mountains from there everybody tried to reach Pakistan by himself.

A farmer from Shigal, brother of a *malek*:

Q: What were the major crops in your area?

A: Rice, wheat, maize, vegetables and poppy for opium (*tariak*). From the latter we earned most of our income.

Q: Did the Government tolerate it?

A: Yes. But when we´ll have an Islamic Government we will not grow poppy anymore. It is unislamic.

Q: Were you people consuming opium?

A: No, we only sold it.

A farmer from Shigal:

Q: Why do you think is the area of Narang so depopulated?

A: There was heavy fighting until last year, the area is particularly open and vulnerable, on the road there was constant (dangerous) traffic from Jalalabad. In addition many people of Narang were collaborators with the communists. When the latter left the collaborators went together with them to Jalalabad or they fled from the Mujaheddin to Pakistan. They will not be allowed to go back.

Summary

In this short survey among refugees from Kunar about opinions and attitudes towards their return to Kunar it becomes evident that most of them are not yet ready to return. The main reason is the general and multiple insecurity for families in Kunar. This means that there is no stable and predictable political setup in Kunar, it is physically dangerous (mines and marauders) and people are not sure whether they and their families can survive in future, and whether in case of economic failure they will be able to flee again to Pakistan. Kunar may turn out to be a trap. For single families it seems to be particularly dangerous to return because there are yet too few civilians in the area and no organization or institution can guarantee their security. This vicious circle can only be broken by an organized mass-return. There seem to be indications that within one or two parties such a turn is discussed. Although I doubt that foreign rehabilitation projects will have any noticeable effect on the return of refugees I still consider all efforts to reconstructing the infrastructure in Kunar as necessary to avoid a major disaster when suddenly the refugees decide to come home. However, it should be considered to extend rehabilitation projects into areas where a more or less intact civilian population still lives, we should not focus too much on the reluctant refugee.

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R E T U R N   T O   K U N A R ?

An Enquiry Among Refugees from Kunar in Bajaur

by

Bernt Glatzer

March 1990

D A C A A R Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees

The Problem:

When the Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan last year the dominant opinion among Afghan and foreign observers was that the refugee population in Pakistan would soon return home. The main obstacle on their way back seemed to be the ruined infrastructure and economy of Afghanistan and the threat of land mines. According to this logic efforts in reconstructing the country's infrastructure and food production would motivate the refugees to return, or would even have a direct pull-back effect on them. If this is true, refugees from those areas where infrastructure and food production is already (or still) functioning should be the first to return.

Kunar is such an area: Refugees began leaving Kunar as early as 1978, in the meantime the majority of Kunar's population lives in Pakistan, mostly in Bajaur. Today Kunar is relatively peaceful and it is totally free from Government (Kabul) control. Thanks to the efforts of the remaining farmers, of many NGOs, and thanks to favorable weather conditions in recent months the valley is green, agriculture appears almost back to normal, bazaars are open and well equipped, lively motor traffic links Kunar with Pakistan. But in spite of all this, only very few refugees have returned home to Kunar.

The usual explanations available in Peshawar are the following two: (1) The refugees wait for an Islamic Government in Kabul, only then will they return in "honour and safety"; (2) The refugees now became accustomed to the "easy life" in Pakistan and to their monthly rations. In Afghanistan they had to work for their own living. The first is the standard argument of the various Afghan parties as well as of the Pakistan Government and has no doubt a certain influence on the refugees; the second may hold true for a minority of Afghan refugees. Whoever is acquainted with the living conditions in the refugee camps will reject this second "explanation". What is then the reason?

The Trip:

Participants: Bernt Glatzer
Abdul Quddus (Interpreter)

Itinerary: Departure from Peshawar: 10 March 1990, 10:00
Road via Malakand, Dir,
Arrival in Yussufabad/Bajaur 16:30, same day.
Accommodation during the whole trip:
Koh-e-Mor Hotel in Yussufabad/Bajaur.
Trips within Bajaur: Yussufabad Camp, Omari Camp, Kerala

Camp, Khazana Camp, each of these camps were visited several times. On the 13th March we reported our stay to the office of the Political Agent in Khar.

Return to Peshawar: 16 March 1990, 16:00 via the same route.

Visit of DACAAR projects: We visited the compounds of the water supply and bath projects, the former every day because it was the starting point of our daily excursions. I was impressed by the quality of the work and the good morale of our staff members. We saw how the shallow wells and baths were installed in situ and found that the refugees in the camps are highly appreciating our work. Eng. Rashidi and Mr. Moh. Ghaus were constantly helping us to find competent informants and to guided us in the area. Without their help our task could not have been carried out successfully.

The Method:

I used the anthropological method of qualitative intensive interviews with a few selected informants instead of a standardized inquiry or of an opinion poll. The advantage of that method lies in the possibility to relate the answers individually to the social, political, and cultural background of each informant. Questions and the way of questioning were flexibly adapted to each individual and further developed with every answer obtained. The disadvantage of such a method is its lack of representativeness, it cannot be assessed how many people were of this or that opinion. However, in times of crises opinions change very quickly whereas the range of options people have and the general way of thinking may be more stable. The distribution of opinions within a population does not allow us to predict common actions of that people. I am aware that our field trip was very short, therefore the findings can only be considered as preliminary.

The Informants:

We interviewed 17 Kunari refugees in depth, the interviews lasted from two to four hours. A much larger number of people was questioned in several group interviews. Not counted are many short conversations with people whom we met occasionally in the street, in tea houses and elsewhere. We had also talks with locals of Bajaur about their relationship with the refugees. The informants were of different age, from 18 to 80, of different social, economic and political standing and from different areas in Kunar: Bar

Kanday, Korangal, Shigal, Kerala, Chagha Sarai, Narang, Pashad, Sarkanay and Marawara.

The Questions:

The main question was why the informant and his family don't return to Kunar. Why to his knowledge others don't return, under which conditions would he consider to return, what are the main obstacles for his and his neighbours' return and what does he expect of the future in Kunar or here in Pakistan?

These main questions were individually packed into other questions about the informant's social and economic background and that of his village or valley, about social and political conditions before 1978, during the war and at present and various other subjects the informant seemed to be interested in. I appreciated also when an informant himself took the lead of the interview and asked questions himself, and when he added details I had not asked about.

The Findings:

Since times immemorial there is a constant flux of people across the Hindu Raj between Kunar and Bajaur. We met people from Kunar who came to Bajaur before 1978, others who hat emigrated from Bajaur to Kunar earlier and re-immigrated to Bajaur after 1978, People had also emigrated from Kunar to Northern Afghanistan long ago, fled back to Kunar after 1978 and later to Bajaur. However, the majority of the total population in Bajaur are Kunaris who came after 1978.

The first refugee settlements in Kunar were already set up shortly after April 1978 when opposition against the Kabul Government began. Today it is a matter of pride to having been among the first refugees from 1978. We hardly met anyone who admitted being a late-comer. The later the refugees came the more are they suspected by the "older" refugees of having collaborated with the regime. This attitude is one of the factors why individual families hesitate to go back; in case they had to come back to Bajaur they would be classified among the suspected late-comers. We also frequently heard suspicions that families who now live in Kunar might be collaborators with the Kabul Government, this does also not encourage refugees to return.

Most of the informants clearly stated that bombings and the immediate threats from the Government forces drove them out of the country but some informants admitted that they fled primarily

because their economic situation deteriorated after 1978 and they could not feed their families anymore in Kunar. Formerly they met such situations by seeking employment in other parts of Afghanistan, in Iran, and also in Pakistan, the former two alternatives were blocked now.

There were four main answers given to the question why they are still in Pakistan. These answers do not exclude each other, actually most of the respondents offered at least three of the four at different stages of the interview. The first one was given normally when we asked the key question too early in the interview when the informants were not yet sure about our intentions. These "answers" are not verbal transcripts of single statements but are condensations of what informants conveyed to us in many different expressions.

The four main answers to the key question:

(1) We must not return to Kunar as long as we are fighting for an Islamic Government in Kabul. Even if there is peace in Kunar we must not forget the rest of Afghanistan and we must concentrate all our efforts to liberating Kabul. This we can do best as long as we know our families to live in safety in the camps in Pakistan. It cannot be excluded that war and bombings might return to Kunar and while being at *jihad* we cannot defend our families.

(2) We came here 10 or 12 years ago because we resisted the communists from the beginning. Those who came recently had made their peace with the Government or even supported it, they had a good life in Kunar and only left their homes after the communists were driven out by us. Many of those who still stay in Kunar were also collaborators and don´t dare to come to Pakistan. If I return now to Kunar individually with my family I shall be counted among those collaborators. Therefore I only dare to go back with all the others.

(3) Kunar is still not safe for our families for two reasons: mines and armed gangs who may loot and rape our families. There is neither Government nor army nor police to protect us. I look forward to return home, but only together with all my relatives and neighbours.

(4) Our economic survival in Kunar is not secured. Although Kunar is fertile and wheat is growing this year almost as normal we do not know whether this will last. What will happen if the harvest would fail next year? We cannot be sure whether we would receive relief supplies or whether we could return to Pakistan. Kunar might be a trap for those who return now.

I do not feel that the first argument has a decisive impact on the actual behaviour of the refugees. It is what they hear from the spokesmen of their parties and may be most of them approve it in principle but when it comes to the vital question about the survival of one´s family the Islamic Government in Kabul looses its priority. Now the parties also seem to be of different opinions concerning the return of refugees, the remark of one respondent that Hizb-e Islami (G) is now propagating the return(see below) is very interesting, I have yet to find out whether this has any foundation. Even if the informant had mistaken his party line it shows that things are being discussed controversially in the camps.

To sum up, the interviews in total reveal that the respondents are most concerned about their personal security. Security in a double sense:(1) security from mines, fighting and gangsters and (2) economic security. They are not yet ready to believe that the present prospects of a good harvest in 1990 will last. In the Pakistani camps life might be uncomfortable and congested but at least it is secure. During the last decade in Pakistan rations may have been irregular sometimes but nobody died of hunger; concerning Kunar nobody is sure about that. Things may go wrong again, harvests may fail, war might come again, even a civil war between the main parties in Kunar cannot be ruled out. In such a case Kunar might turn out to be a trap, the way back to Pakistan may be blocked by then. Thus the general attitude is: "stay and wait."

Others are caught in a vicious circle: Because in Kunar there are too few people it is unsafe, because it is unsafe, more people don´t come. This circle cannot be broken by individual decisions to go back but only by an organized mass-return.

International Aid

As far as international aid is concerned I am convinced it has very little influence on the return of the refugees. Even if we turn Kunar into a Garden of Eden, the security problem will remain and most of the refugees will prefer their present situation. Many of them will rather try to get the best of both worlds, i.e. enjoying security, rations and employment opportunities in Pakistan and reaping their wheat and the benefits from rehabilitation projects in Kunar.

On the other hand this should not be misunderstood as a plea for withdrawal of international aid from Kunar, to the contrary: One day the refugees will return (for whatever reasons), then the present rehabilitation works will be of immense help to avoid chaos and disaster. For the time being I would suggest to extend reha-

bilitation efforts to areas where a relative large part of the population has stayed home, i.e. in the more remote areas of Kunar, e.g. upper Shigal, Badel, Koranggal etc etc. It would benefit the population there right now and would prevent them from also emigrating to Pakistan.

Relationships between Locals and Refugees:

Locals of Bajaur frequently complain about the refugees having deteriorated the ecology of the area by setting up camps throughout, by cutting plants for fuel, and by over-grazing. They say that refugees are a threat to local security, had increased the rate of criminality and are encroaching on the fields, villages and even on the houses of the local population.

The refugees on the other hand express their pride that they had upgraded Bajaur; before 1978 they claim it had been a "desert", that refugees had taught the Bajauris how to dig wells, irrigate and run the agriculture properly, that many of them work as tenants on the fields and do work the locals were not ready to do. One informant even maintained that before the advent of the Afghan refugees the Bajauris did not even know how to build houses and *qala*s properly.

In all we got the impression that despite the heavy demographic pressure from the side of the refugees peace is prevailing between the two populations and agriculture as well as commerce (considering all the new and well equipped shops in Khar) is flourishing.

A selection of typical statements:

There follows a few informants´ statements verbally translated but taken out of context. However, they highlight the most common attitudes revealed in the interviews. Answers of other informants to our key questions were mostly on the same line.
What I left out here are much longer parts of the interviews which were on the economic and social situation of the respondents and their villages and on the local political organization before and during the war. Those discussions were preconditions to very frank talks on our key questions. Reading the following statements one might not necessarily come to the same conclusions as I did, but the answers to my questions on family and village economy reveal the very high priority Kunaris give to their economic security.

I plan to submit another report on the economic and political parts of the interviews later.

The key questions:

A farmer from Shigal pretending to be an active *mujahed*:

Q: If someone decides to return with his family to Kunar would he be criticized?

A: No, who wants to go back may go back, but I would not bring back my family at present.

Q: Why?

A: First we need an Islamic Government in Kabul, for this we have fought so long. Secondly it is not safe in Kunar, there are too few people. Women have to leave the villages to fetch wood, they may step on mines or may be raped by thieves. Thirdly I don´t know whether my family could survive at present in Kunar and whether our harvest would be sufficient. Fourthly if my family would be in Kunar I had also to be there, then I could not participate in the *jihad* because I would have to take care and guard my family. Here in Bajaur my family is safe. Only an Islamic Government in Kabul will decide when and how we shall return.

A farmer from Marawar:

Q: Would you go back if mines were cleared?

A: No, I´ve got no time because of *jihad*. If people would now work on their fields, nobody would go to *jihad*. On the other hand Scud missiles may still fall on Kunar.

Q: Don´t you need bread in *jihad*? Who should grow wheat?

A: Our parties have considered this: The *mujaheddin* recreating from *jihad* should do agriculture. We have two aims: *jihad* and agriculture for *jihad*.

A store keeper from Gundel, Dargai area of Bar Kanday, Pech:

Q: How many people are still in your area?

A: About 1/5.

Q: Why is this 1/5 still there?

A: These people are mountain dwellers, they raise livestock. It was impossible for them to bring their livestock to Pakistan. Instead they fled further up to the mountains. Later they returned to the valley in order to work on the fields. Many still live up on the mountains and only come down to do agriculture. They deliver the harvest to the mujaheddin.

Q: Who decides who should flee and who should remain?

A: Everyone himself.

Q: What would you tell to a person who wants to return to Kunar now for living there?

A: I would criticize him because our home is the whole of Afghanistan. We want to liberate the whole of Afghanistan. If someone returns now he has do assure us that he will work for the *jihad* and not for the Kabul Government.
(without being asked a related question:) Even if we do not return now, we make sure that nobody will steal our land, neither the communists nor anybody else!

A teacher:

Q: Why refugees don´t return?

A: They came to Bajaur with a lot of efforts. The have built up their livelihood here. In Kunar they are not sure of their survival. They feel it´s unsafe there. How will they rebuild their houses? Who will protect them from mines? Canals are destroyed, many things come together.

A farmer from lower Shigal:

Q: Have you been to Shigal recently?

A: Yes. Last year *mujaheddin* repaired a part of our irrigation canals and grew some wheat for their bread.

Q: If people grow something now, will this go to the *mujaheddin?*

A: There are also many families living there, their wheat is first eaten by themselves, surplus is sold to the *mujaheddin* for a favourable price.

Q: How many families live now in lower Shigal?

A: About 3000.

Q: And before the war?

A: 17-18000 families.

Q: Do you know of families who returned to Shigal recently?

A: Yes, last Saturday one family returned. Others follow. The people here are in favour of returning home now. Our area is fertile.

Another farmer from Shigal attending the same interview (member of (HIG):
(spontaneously:) We have to bring back our families now in order to re-establish agriculture.

Q: It seems that the parties oppose your returning home as long as the fight for an Islamic Government in Kabul is going on?

A: No, our commanders Eng. Wahidullah and Kashmir Khan being both from Shigal have recently ordered us to take our fami lies back to Shigal. They said this here in this camp. They promised that HIG would support us with food.

Q: Why are you still here?

A At the moment we don´t see a possibility to go back. I have recently been there and saw that our fields are too damaged, our families wouldn´t survive. As soon as I am convinced that it is viable I´ll return with my family.